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R 082023Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1607
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 6373
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 3697
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7567
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 4817
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2069
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2142
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 1963
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4267
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4706
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9291
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS LA PAZ 003337

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STATE FOR WHA/AND LPETRONI
BRASILIA FOR JSTORY AND LSTONER
USAID/LAC FOR AFRANCO, MSILVERMAN, RLOUDIS, AND JBISSON
USAID/EGAT FOR CJACKSON, ANE FOR JWILSON
COMMERCE FOR JANGLIN
TREASURY FOR SGOOCH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BL](#)

SUBJECT: COMMUNITIES DEMAND CLEAN-UP OF LAKE TITICACA

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Since May 2005, communities on Lake Titicaca have demanded that the GOB reduce the lake's increasing contamination. Human activity has negatively affected plant and animal species and threatened the lake's fragile ecosystem. GOB officials say the Morales administration is committed to reducing pollution, but the government has few plans and lacks the technical and financial resources needed to mount a concerted clean-up. End summary.

COMMUNITIES DEMAND ACTION

¶2. (U) Since May 2005, when eleven local leaders organized public protests, communities on Lake Titicaca have demanded that the GOB reduce the lake's increasing contamination. Community leaders have repeatedly denounced the lake's deteriorating water quality and asked the government to commit money and resources to comprehensive pollution control efforts, complaining of widespread damage to fisheries, croplands, and livestock; many fear that uncontrolled contamination will devastate incomes and traditional ways of life, particularly in a region where agriculture and cattle ranching are the principal economic activities.

HUMAN IMPACTS ON WATER RESOURCES

¶3. (U) According to a case study published in the 2003 UN World Water Development Report, human activity has negatively affected plant and animal species and threatened Lake Titicaca's fragile ecosystem. Untreated or partially treated human and industrial waste from El Alto, a city of approximately 800,000 residents on the plains above La Paz, contaminates rivers that drain into the lake, creating

special problems for the plants and animals of Cohana Bay. The nutrient-rich wastewater promotes eutrophication, or the excessive growth of aquatic plants, which deprives fish and other marine life of oxygen. This phenomenon, together with declining quantities of totora reeds, which help filter water impurities and are used to build boats and furnish cattle fodder, has upset the balance of plant and animal life in the bay. Untreated waste from smaller towns and villages exacerbates the problem, as do runoff and heavy metal contamination from cattle ranching and nearby ore processing facilities and mines.

14. (U) Other human activities, such as the introduction of non-native fish species, reliance on pollution-prone trout farming, severe overfishing, poorly planned dam construction, and uncontrolled water use, also threaten Lake Titicaca's ecosystem. Local residents introduced high-value non-native fish species such as trout and mackerel into the lake in the early 1930s; since then, populations of native species such as karachi and boga have declined dramatically, and many are now considered vulnerable or endangered. Trout farms constructed on the lake's southern shore have released tons of waste into the water, while increases in the number of people making a living from fishing have raised pressure on fish populations. Dams built to prevent or minimize flooding have altered the lake's water levels and flow patterns and submerged once productive croplands, and uncontrolled water use has threatened to drain the shallows in totora reed areas. Together with untreated sewage and livestock and mining runoff, these present additional problems for scientists and local communities hoping to protect the lake and its resources.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) GOB officials say the Morales administration is committed to reducing Lake Titicaca's pollution, but the government has few plans and lacks the technical and financial resources needed to mount a concerted clean-up. Bolivia's joint ownership of the lake with Peru complicates matters, as officials disagree over what should be done and who should pay. In the absence of stronger coordination and more funding, local communities' persistent demands for action will likely remain unanswered, at least for now.
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